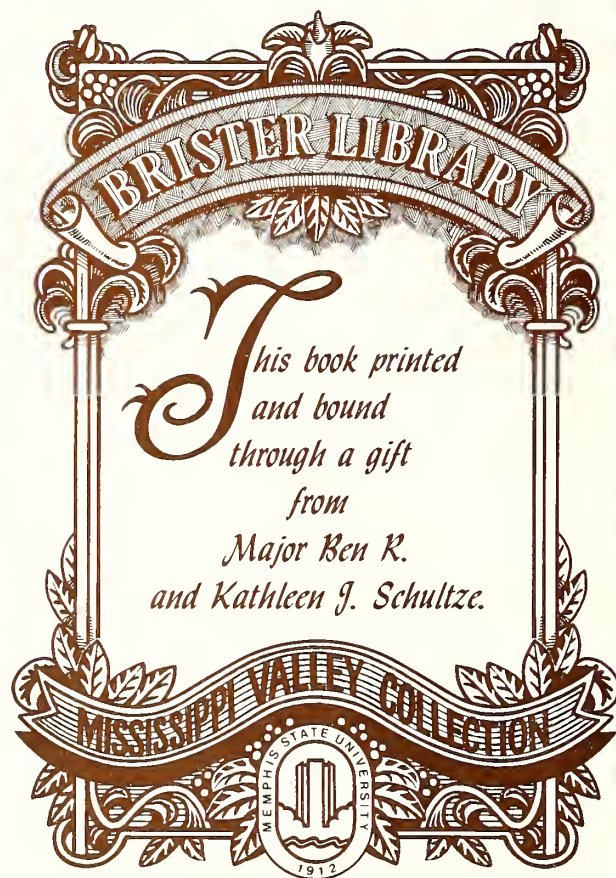


THE MEMPHIS JEWISH COMMUNITY  
AWARENESS AND RESPONSE TO HOLOCAUST  
INTERVIEW WITH DR. JUSTIN H. ADLER

BY A. MARK LEVIN

ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE  
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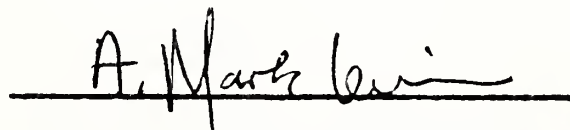
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That this interview will be used by no one except the interviewee, DR. JUSTIN H. ADLER, and the interviewer, A. MARK LEVIN, for a period of 5 years without the written consent of both the interviewer and the interviewee. In the event of the death of either of the above mentioned parties during this period of time written consent must be secured from the surviving party. At the expiration of 5 years from this date the interview will become the unrestricted property of Memphis State University unless the period of restriction is extended by the interviewee.

PLACE MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE.

DATE 01-15-1990

  
(Interviewee)

  
(For the Mississippi Valley Archives  
of the John Willard Brister Library of  
Memphis State University)



THIS IS THE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT OF DR. CHARLES W. CRAWFORD AT MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY. THE PROJECT IS "THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN THE CONTEXT OF MEMPHIS IN THE 1930s AND ITS AWARENESS OF AND RESPONSE TO THE GROWING CRISIS OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN GERMANY UNDER HITLER, CULMINATING IN KRISTALNACHT, NOVEMBER, 1938, AND THE JOURNEY OF THE ST. LOUIS, JUNE, 1939." TODAY IS JANUARY 15, 1990. THE PLACE IS MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE. THE INTERVIEW IS WITH DR. JUSTIN H. ADLER, 345 NORTH PERKINS ROAD, MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE. THE INTERVIEW IS BY A. MARK LEVIN, GRADUATE STUDENT IN THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AT MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY. THE INTERVIEW IS TRANSCRIBED BY RUTH COX AND EDITED BY A. MARK LEVIN.

MR. LEVIN: Dr. Adler, if we may, I would like to start a little bit with your background. You earlier mentioned to me that your family lived in southwestern Germany.

DR. ADLER: Yes.

MR. LEVIN: What was the name of the town?

DR. ADLER: Gruenstadt. Spelled G-R-U-E-N-S-T-A-D-T.

MR. LEVIN: And your mother was born in Gruenstadt?

DR. ADLER: No, my mother was born in a small town called Breitenheim. B-R-E-I-T-E-N-H-E-I-M.

MR. LEVIN: And your father?

DR. ADLER: And my father was born in a small Bavarian town called Schopfloch. S-C-H-O-P-F-L-O-C-H.



MR. LEVIN: Your parents settled in Gruenstadt and your father was in business there. What kind of store did he have?

DR. ADLER: He had a retail shoe store.

MR. LEVIN: You were born in Gruenstadt?

DR. ADLER: I was born in Gruenstadt.

MR. LEVIN: In what year?

DR. ADLER: In 1907.

MR. LEVIN: And you went to elementary school and high school in Gruenstadt?

DR. ADLER: In Gruenstadt. Yes. Before I went to the university, I took college courses somewhere else.

MR. LEVIN: Yes. Was there a large Jewish community in Gruenstadt?

DR. ADLER: No, not a large one. Gruenstadt was a town of about 4,500 people, and I think there were 70 or 80 families in Gruenstadt.

MR. LEVIN: And these 70 or 80 families were able to sustain a Synagogue or Temple?

DR. ADLER: Yes, we had a small, little Synagogue.

MR. LEVIN: Was it a Reform or Orthodox?

DR. ADLER: Well, according to our concept here, we were almost Orthodox. Almost, you know. No, we were considered to be Orthodox, really. Women were separate from the men and all the Jewish holidays were celebrated and the stores were closed. Services were conducted in Hebrew, and just with a few German prayers occasionally in between. It





was, I would say, our concept of Orthodox. We did not call ourselves Orthodox, but we were Orthodox.

MR. LEVIN: What was the largest city closest to you?

DR. ADLER: The largest city close -- there were really two larger cities. One was Worms -- W-O-R-M-S, the other one was Ludwigshafen -- it was on the Rhine River.

MR. LEVIN: How old were you when you graduated high school?

DR. ADLER: I graduated from high school at 16.

MR. LEVIN: And that would be in the year 1923, approximately.

DR. ADLER: Yes, something like that - yes.

MR. LEVIN: What did you do when you graduated high school?

DR. ADLER: What did I do? Well, of course, the high school was somewhat divided according to our concept. Part of the high school I went to was in a town called Neustadt -- N-E-U-S-T-A-D-T. Where I made what we call our abitur. Abitur means a type of examination and completion before you could enter the university.

MR. LEVIN: Which you successfully completed?

DR. ADLER: Not immediately. Due to a terrible inflation, I worked in a bank for three years before I entered the University of Heidelberg in 1927.

MR. LEVIN: And you entered university?

DR. ADLER: Entered university.

MR. LEVIN: In which university did you enroll?

DR. ADLER: University of Heidelberg, Germany.

MR. LEVIN: Was that far from Neustadt?



DR. ADLER: Well, not very far, according to our concept here. It was fairly close by, but as to our concept at that time, it was a day's travel.

MR. LEVIN: What course of study did you enroll in Heidelberg ?

DR. ADLER: Medicine. Medicine and Law in the beginning.

MR. LEVIN: How long did it take before you qualified as a doctor?

DR. ADLER: You mean, to graduate from --

MR. LEVIN: Yes -- medical school.

DR. ADLER: Six years.

MR. LEVIN: So that, what year did you graduate medical school?

DR. ADLER: 1933.

MR. LEVIN: 1933. Did you begin practicing medicine in Germany?

DR. ADLER: That was a peculiar thing. No. I got my degree and my diploma, and the first thing, you had to have one year of internship -- practical internship. And for that purpose I had obtained an internship in a large hospital in Berlin. The name of the hospital was Krankenhaus am Friedrichhein . You want me to spell it? Krankenhaus means the hospital, you know -- K-R-A-N-K-E-N-H-A-U-S, am A-M, Friedrichhein F-R-I-E-D-R-I-C-H-H-E-I-N. This was in May, 1933. I entered --

MR. LEVIN: What did you do between 1927 and 1933?





DR. ADLER: I'm sorry. I need to make a correction. I entered university in 1927, and I graduated from medical school in 1933.

MR. LEVIN: Then you went to Berlin?

DR. ADLER: No, that [graduation] was in February, 1933.

And the first of May, I was supposed to go to Berlin, which I did. I entered the hospital as an intern in May, 1933. This was already after Hitler was in power. After I was there for two days, the Nazis came and said "all Jews out!" And all Jewish doctors had to leave immediately. Now, I want to tell you a very funny story. Funny though it has a tragic element in it. At that time, I did not have a realistic idea what was going on because somehow or another you had so many Jewish friends and Gentile friends. I mean, you couldn't see that such a thing would be possible, you know. Just like the majority of people. So after I was thrown out of the hospital, I had the gall to go to the headquarters of the SS -- the headquarters -- not of the storm troopers, but the SS it was -- you know, the elite highest echelon, the Blackshirts. I walked into the headquarters with the idea of trying to complain. I went up to the headquarters and I stood there in the corridor for a while, not knowing where to enter. One SS officer in uniform came to me and said to me, "Young man -- what you want?" I told him I wanted to lodge a complaint. And he said "What kind of complaint? Tell me about it." So I told him what happened to me -- that I was thrown out of a job which I had because I



was Jewish. And he looked at me from top to bottom. Then he put his hand on my shoulder and he said, "Young man, go on home." I looked at him again, and he said to me, "Just go on home. Take my advice. Go home and forget about it. Just go home." And he said it in such a way, with such an expression on his face, which was friendly, but determined, that I took it seriously. And I turned around, went home, went back to Gruenstadt, my hometown, and wrote a letter immediately to my Uncle Herman Adler (my mother's brother) in Memphis, telling him and outlining approximately what happened, and asked him for an affidavit [to enable me] to come to the United States, which I received very shortly after with the help of Senator McKellar, who was at that time the Senator of Tennessee, who -- with his intervention, I obtained [a visa].

MR. LEVIN: What do you mean by his "help"?

DR. ADLER: He immediately wrote a letter to the American Consul in Stuttgart, Germany, asking him to give me an affidavit, whereupon I received my affidavit within six hours, and I arrived in August [1933] in the United States.

MR. LEVIN: You came by boat?

DR. ADLER: By the boat. By Bremen. The boat was named the Bremen.

MR. LEVIN: What line was that? The Hamburg line?

DR. ADLER: Hamburg-American Line, I believe. It could have been the "North-German Lloyd."

MR. LEVIN: Do you have any siblings, Dr. Adler?



DR. ADLER: I had a brother who came one year later, but he died. He was twenty months younger. His name was Ernest, and he came to Memphis, too -- to the same uncle. He arrived one year later. See, I came in 1933. He came in 1934. And my parents came in 1935. That's the way it was. They came back again later in 1937.

MR. LEVIN: But when you left in 1933, you left your parents in Germany?

DR. ADLER: Yes.

MR. LEVIN: They had no concerns about what was happening? They did not want to --

DR. ADLER: They knew it would be bad for me, but they thought since my father was a veteran of World War I, and was in fact a decorated veteran of World War I of the German Army, that nothing would happen to him. But they did not realize that shortly after that, his name was to be erased from the plaques where the names of all the war participants were listed.

MR. LEVIN: What motivated him to come to the United States in 1935?

DR. ADLER: Me?

MR. LEVIN: Your Parents.

DR. ADLER: I wrote them -- please come, please come -- you know, come out. We want you to be here. The future [in Germany] is not so good. But of course, many times it is difficult to convince older people of what's going to be.





MR. LEVIN: Did your parents have family in Germany as well?

DR. ADLER: Yes.

MR. LEVIN: Siblings, brothers and sisters?

DR. ADLER: Yes.

MR. LEVIN: What was the disposition with them? Did they come to the United States?

DR. ADLER: Yes, they all came. But not all. Some were killed, some came to the United States, and one went to South America.

MR. LEVIN: So when your parents came to Memphis in 1935, how long did they stay in Memphis?

DR. ADLER: All their life.

MR. LEVIN: No, you mentioned that in 1935 they went back to Germany.

DR. ADLER: Oh, at that time. Yes, they went back to Germany and came back in 1937.

MR. LEVIN: In 1935, when they were in Memphis, how long did they stay?

DR. ADLER: Oh, about four weeks.

MR. LEVIN: Why did they return to Germany?

DR. ADLER: Why? Because they thought it would blow over. And they couldn't see how my father could make a living. Not being able to speak English. They, like so many foolish people, thought it would go away.

MR. LEVIN: So they returned in 1935 to Germany. In 1937, they left Germany again.

DR. ADLER: And came to Memphis.



MR. LEVIN: What triggered their leaving Germany in 1937?  
That overcame their fears about making a living?

DR. ADLER: Now, what happened then -- it was an immediate threat -- I even have certain proof here. They had to sell their home. They were forced to sell their home at a ridiculous price to some other people -- gentiles -- in Gruenstadt. And they moved away from Gruenstadt to a larger town nearby -- Mannheim -- because they thought they wouldn't be so conspicuous any more. And they lived in Mannheim for about two years before they finally decided to come over here. They had to come.

MR. LEVIN: Who sponsored their coming to Memphis?

DR. ADLER: My Uncle, Herman Adler.

MR. LEVIN: Do you know how many other people your Uncle Herman Adler sponsored? Yourself, your brother, your parents? Did he sponsor others as well?

DR. ADLER: He sponsored my brother and me and my parents. Let's see if there was anybody else here. Yes, he sponsored two more sisters and four more nephews and nieces.

MR. LEVIN: Okay, if we could come back to the time when you just arrived in Memphis in August, 1933.

DR. ADLER: In September 1933.

MR. LEVIN: What did you begin doing in Memphis?

DR. ADLER: What did I first do?

MR. LEVIN: Yes, say you were a qualified doctor.





DR. ADLER: What I first did, I sat down and started learning English. Even though I knew some English already, which I had studied before.

MR. LEVIN: Did you learn it through the Neighborhood House that had classes.

DR. ADLER: No, that was too slow for me. I studied English from books, and then there was one minister here in town, a Gentile minister. He was a minister of the Unitarian Church. His name was Dr. Petrie, who taught me English by using the Bible. Using the Book of Ruth. I still remember. And from this Bible, I learned one word to another, and I went there every day for about an hour and a half or two hours, walking from downtown Memphis, Main and Linden, to Vance and Bellevue. I walked most of the time, because I wanted to save some money at the time. Which was only seven cents for a trip by streetcar.

MR. LEVIN: Where were you living at the time -- with your uncle in the hotel?

DR. ADLER: At the hotel -- the Adler Hotel.

MR. LEVIN: Were you working there as well? Helping?

DR. ADLER: No, he didn't want me to work. He wanted me to learn English.

MR. LEVIN: That was far-sighted of him.

DR. ADLER: Yes, he didn't want me to work. He gave me an allowance of \$5 a week. At that time in 1933, and I spent some of it, and some -- most -- I saved and so on.



MR. LEVIN: After you learned English and became proficient in the language --

DR. ADLER: Learned English -- we had to learn English for various things. Now, I still have the books here which I first started out in English learning. It was a German edition, but I was very fond of languages and very fond of reading and learning and studying. And so, I learned pretty fast. In fact, to the point that three months after I had come to Memphis, I began as assistant instructor in the Department of Anatomy in the Medical School here in Memphis. And then one month later --

MR. LEVIN: Was there any person in the community who was helpful to you in getting that appointment?

DR. ADLER: My cousin, my first cousin, Dr. Gilbert Levy, who was a professor of Pediatrics at the school. He helped me to get a little job, which didn't pay nothing. But four weeks later I started teaching anatomy, so I had a pretty good command of English already at that time.

MR. LEVIN: Had you already specialized as a psychiatrist?

DR. ADLER: No, but I was interested in it. I had courses in Germany in psychiatry.

MR. LEVIN: How long did you teach anatomy?

DR. ADLER: How long?

MR. LEVIN: Yes.

DR. ADLER: Until -- wait a moment -- oh, I would say about one year, approximately. Maybe a bit less.



MR. LEVIN: So that in 1934, you moved on from teaching anatomy . Where did you move on to?

DR. ADLER: Western State Hospital. Bolivar, Tennessee.

MR. LEVIN: What kind of appointment did you have there?

DR. ADLER: I had an internship there.

MR. LEVIN: And how long did you remain there?

DR. ADLER: I remained there about one year. A little bit over one year.

MR. LEVIN: And where did you go after that?

DR. ADLER: Then I went from there to Baltimore, Maryland, at the Baltimore City Hospitals. At the same time I had an appointment at Johns Hopkins Medical School in psychiatry.

MR. LEVIN: How long were you in Baltimore, Johns Hopkins?

DR. ADLER: A year and a half.

MR. LEVIN: And then you returned to Memphis?

DR. ADLER: I returned to Western State Hospital as a resident physician in psychiatry. At that time we didn't have too many chances in psychiatry. It was still a rather odd specialty at the time.

MR. LEVIN: So you were in Western State Hospital in Bolivar until 1938?

DR. ADLER: That's right.

MR. LEVIN: And then you returned to Memphis?

DR. ADLER: That's right.

MR. LEVIN: Do you recall what month in 1938 you established your own practice in Memphis?



DR. ADLER: In June.

MR. LEVIN: In June, 1938? And you remained in Memphis in 1939, 1940, through the war years?

DR. ADLER: Not through the war years. Only until 1942.

MR. LEVIN: Until 1942. And then?

DR. ADLER: And then I entered the military service.

MR. LEVIN: As a doctor.

DR. ADLER: As a physician. In the American Army, of course. And I remained in the military service from 1942 until 1946 -- four years, from 1942 to 1946.

MR. LEVIN: Did your Army service take you overseas to Germany?

DR. ADLER: No, but overseas. It took me overseas to England and to France.

MR. LEVIN: If we might come back again, Dr. Adler, to the 1930 years -- 1933, 1934, when you were in Memphis, and then 1938, 1939, 1940, again when you were in Memphis. You had left Germany because of the anti-Semitic outburst that you had personally experienced in your own life and in the life of your family.

DR. ADLER: But I told you, it was not the only one. There were many other incidents.

MR. LEVIN: Yes, but that's what motivated you to leave. When you came to Memphis, in the years in the 1930's until 1941, did you experience anti-Semitism here in Memphis?





DR. ADLER: Well, when you say anti-Semitism, let's say there was a certain amount of silent anti-Semitism of more or less avoidance of Jews, not so much anti-Semitism as a-Semitism.

MR. LEVIN: How did this a-Semitism express itself? This silent anti-Semitism?

DR. ADLER: Well, the difference, I mean -- I'm sorry...

MR. LEVIN: How did it express itself?

DR. ADLER: The a-Semitism? Well, you couldn't join certain clubs. You couldn't go certain places.

You were not invited anywhere in particular. You know, you were just --

MR. LEVIN: Were there residential sections that were closed to Jews?

DR. ADLER: Yes, there were certain residential sections in Memphis at that time which were closed to Jewish people in general. The Morningside Park [section] was one of them. You know where Morningside Park is. And I don't know whether any Jews are there right now. I don't have any idea, and of course, Memphis Country Club didn't accept any Jews. It still doesn't do now. Of course, there was one Jewish club at that time. It was the Ridgeway Club, where the members were Memphis Jews -- usually of West European descent. Very few members at all of the Baron Hirsch, Beth El Emeth, Anshei Sphard, etc. belonged to the Ridgeway Country Club. There was an unwritten division of some sort.

MR. LEVIN: Between?



DR. ADLER: Between what are called the Jews of possibly German descent, or possibly French descent, or whoever came from Western Europe --

MR. LEVIN: And they were associated mainly with Temple Israel?

DR. ADLER: They associated with Temple Israel. Yes.

MR. LEVIN: And the Jews from Eastern Europe, from Poland and Russia who associated mainly with the Baron Hirsch Congregation --

DR. ADLER: Mostly, and of course a number of them associated with the smaller Congregations here. The Baron Hirsch was, of course, the most prominent one.

MR. LEVIN: When you arrived in Memphis, from 1933 until you were here in 1941, did you encounter other German Jewish refugees who had been sponsored by other Jews in the community?

DR. ADLER: I encountered very few.

MR. LEVIN: Why?

DR. ADLER: Why? Because there were not many here.

MR. LEVIN: Why do you think, in your opinion, were there not too many German Jews, especially if there were German Jews associated with the Temple Israel who probably had family in Germany?

DR. ADLER: I only can tell you the tip of the iceberg. I don't know the total story. I made attempts to have other German Jews brought over. I was rebuffed a number of times.



MR. LEVIN: On what grounds were you rebuffed?

DR. ADLER: They didn't want them to be a burden to the family, number one. They had to sign a paper that would promise not to let them be a burden to the American public. That was one reason. But the other reason was that they didn't want to rock the boat.

MR. LEVIN: When you say, "rock the boat," what do you mean?

DR. ADLER: Many Jews in Memphis at that time as I recall, wanted to be absolutely equal with the non-Jews. And they felt that by raising some Cain about this whole thing, they would arouse some additional anti-Semitism. And so --

MR. LEVIN: Do you feel that the fear of raising additional anti-Semitism -- in your opinion, was that a real fear?

DR. ADLER: Well, I cannot prove it, you know, but this was my feeling at the time.

MRS. ADLER: May I add? At this time, Jews and Gentile people didn't mix here. Jewish people and Gentile people -- Jews and Gentiles did not mix, socially.

DR. ADLER: They never mixed at that time -- absolutely not! They did not mix or occasionally mixed in business. In business, but never socially.

MR. LEVIN: We talked earlier about German Jewish refugees. But at the same time, did you encounter any other Jewish refugees -- from Poland, Russia -- who were arriving in 1934, 1935, 1936?



DR. ADLER: No, I remember only Julius Frank who came about that time.

MRS. ADLER: Yes, but he did not get -- I mean, Julius Frank came, but he had some other connections through a bank.

DR. ADLER: He had connections with the bank. What was his name -- the one who died last year -- Burson's father-in law. Eric Cornell -- he changed his name to Cornell. His name was a different one when he came here.

MR. LEVIN: The Bornblums -- arrived in 1938.

DR. ADLER: But you asked me about the ones arrived at the time that I was here. That was the one. Possibly three or four. The Landaus came shortly after too. The Landau family came in 1933 or 1934.

MRS. ADLER: There came some Jews here after they had come to New York.

MR. LEVIN: In Memphis there was at the time the Jewish Welfare Fund.

DR. ADLER: Yes.

MR. LEVIN: Did you ever approach the Jewish Welfare Fund, which raised dollars to be helpful to Jews in need, for the purpose of raising dollars to sponsor immigrants, or to get people to sign affidavits?

DR. ADLER: I did not, because I wasn't even aware of it.

MR. LEVIN: Do you know anybody who might have done that? Do you know if the Jewish Welfare Fund did try to sponsor some people?





DR. ADLER: I don't know. I really don't know about that.

You know, you must remember that at the beginning, I was here a very short time in Memphis, before I went to my first job out of town. And therefore, I really didn't know.

MR. LEVIN: Okay, when you arrived in Memphis in 1933, and in the years subsequent to that, Memphis was a very racially segregated city.

DR. ADLER: Absolutely!

MR. LEVIN: The black people were second-class citizens. They had separate facilities -- separate drinking fountains, separate rest rooms.

DR. ADLER: That's right.

MR. LEVIN: How did you, as a Jew coming from Germany, where you experienced hatred of Jews -- how did you assess or understand the treatment of blacks in Memphis?

DR. ADLER: Rabbi, when I came to Memphis, it was the first time I saw a black man. The only black man I ever had seen before I came to Memphis was a shoeshine boy who traveled as an advertising man for the Nugget shoe polish company. That was the only one, and he was a big curiosity. We kids -- we followed him around and tried to touch him and feel if his color came off. So, when I came to Memphis and I was certainly sitting there among many, many black people, I couldn't distinguish one from the other. They all looked alike to me. I had a hell of a time saying which one was which. There was one black young man who worked in the hotel



of my uncle whom I saw all the time and recognized him all the time, but I couldn't recognize the others. My attitude was I could not understand it. I didn't understand it because I was told they [the black people] are different, they are not acceptable, and you come here suddenly and you're confronted with a thing like that. You don't know. You cannot immediately stand on your hind feet and say that's wrong, because, my gosh, I was so glad to be here! I did not want to raise any rumbles, as I myself did not feel sufficiently secure in my new environment.

MR. LEVIN: Did you ever have the feeling that the Jews were thankful that there were blacks in Memphis and the south, because if not for the blacks, they may be picking on the Jews?

DR. ADLER: That's right. Not at that time. Later on we mentioned it -- Herta [Dr. Adler's wife] and I talked about it. We had the feeling, later on, that if Hitler had succeeded, he would have succeeded in the United States in eliminating the Jews.

MR. LEVIN: How did the years of the Depression affect you as a refugee, as an immigrant coming in 1933, 1934, at the height of the Depression?

DR. ADLER: No, it was the end of the Depression already. It was the end. That was going towards the end. Because at that time, if I recall right, there were certain movements already afoot toward building up industries. I think they could foresee a war.



MR. LEVIN: That was a little bit later, Dr. Adler. That was in 1938, 1939. But in 1934, 1935, 1936, 1937 --

DR. ADLER: That was true, but it wasn't quite as severe. It was not quite as severe as I was told it was in 1930, 1932 and 1933. I mean, as I recall it.

MR. LEVIN: In your perception, did the Jewish community have any political influence in Memphis at the time? In 1934, 1938, 1939, 1940, 1941?

DR. ADLER: Yes, it had some influence. There were certain Jewish people in Memphis who had strong political influence with Mr. Crump [Memphis and Shelby County political boss with state-wide influence].

MRS. ADLER: (Interjects): Mr. [William] Gerber [Memphis City Attorney] was Mr. Crump's right-hand man.

MR. LEVIN: Did you ever speak to Mr. Gerber?

DR. ADLER: Mr. Gerber -- not very much. Very superficially, I believe. Waldauer -- I spoke with Waldauer, who was a very prominent man at the time.

MR. LEVIN: Abe Waldauer.

DR. ADLER: Abe Waldauer.

MR. LEVIN: Did you speak to him about the plight of the German refugees and the need to do something?

DR. ADLER: I tell you one peculiar experience. After I started practicing, one of my patients who be-



longed to a very prominent Jewish family, said to me, "You know, you are a real nice person, and you are really rather modest, not like those loud German Jews." What could I say?

MRS. ADLER: A real anti-refugee remark.

MR. LEVIN: In 1937, when your parents came to Memphis, and they updated you and shared with you of the developments in Germany, what impact did that make on you?

DR. ADLER: The impact was a feeling of helplessness -- I was glad to have my parents out. What else could we do? There wasn't very much I could do from a public point of view, because I had no standing for anything or for anybody. The only one I could approach was my family [Herman Adler in Memphis] and they cared for the family. I had not enough recognition to be able to do something.

MR. LEVIN: In November, 1938, the events of Kristalnacht occurred. With the massive pogrom [riots] against the Jews, and more than twenty thousand male Jews were sent to the concentration camps of Dachau and others; and among them, there's a Memphian, Al Gruen. I don't know if you know Al Gruen. Al and Irma Gruen. And the billion dollar fine -- a billion reichmarks' fine was imposed upon the German Jewish community. Jews were beaten up in the streets. Jews were harassed. All of this was public knowledge in Memphis because the Memphis Commercial Appeal and the Memphis Press-Scimitar, the afternoon newspaper, had headlines for two weeks in a row. Do you remember if Memphis Jews were agitated by what was happening to the German Jewish





community? Did the Rabbi of the Temple speak out about it? Did the Rabbi of the Baron Hirsch speak out about it? Dr. Ettelson? Rabbi Taxon?

DR. ADLER: Rabbi, one of the hardest things to remember is a feeling. One of the hardest things to remember is what one feels -- what one felt. All I can say only that people were very much upset and perturbed, but I cannot put myself any more back into the emotional state I was in at the time.

MR. LEVIN: Do you recall any meetings being organized?

DR. ADLER: No.

MR. LEVIN: In the community?

DR. ADLER: I don't know of any.

MR. LEVIN: The newspaper records how a Bishop Maxon, who was an Episcopalian Bishop, took the initiative to arrange a mass protest meeting in the Ellis Auditorium for Sunday, November 20. Do you have any recollection of that mass meeting?

DR. ADLER: No, I don't. I really don't.

MR. LEVIN: In 1938, were you still living in your uncle's hotel downtown?

DR. ADLER: At that time, in November 1938 -- yes. I was still living there.

MR. LEVIN: Now, the newspapers record that there were three thousand people--Boss Crump supported the rally.

The Commercial Appeal supported the rally.

DR. ADLER: I'm sorry, I can't remember a thing.



MR. LEVIN: What you can't remember, you can't remember.

What I'm trying to establish is did Jews talk about that meeting? Did they participate in it? Were they there? And if you don't remember it and your contemporaries and your peers didn't talk about it, then clearly it wasn't an event that made any impression.

DR. ADLER: I know if one doesn't remember some things, that of course automatically means that they didn't make a major impression. But rightfully so, I probably -- it must have perturbed me, because -- G-d -- I was part of it. But I cannot tell you, Rabbi --

MR. LEVIN: It interests me that the Jewish community in Memphis or that part of it that originally came from Germany --

DR. ADLER: I do know, of course, that prior to the Kristallnacht or just shortly before, or possibly around that time, probably before, that's where I made the effort to visit people and get them to give affidavits. I know this for sure, because afterward, it was almost impossible --

MR. LEVIN: Would you recall how many people you visited to try and get them to give affidavits?

DR. ADLER: Well, I would say about four different families.

MR. LEVIN: Did you meet with any success?

DR. ADLER: No.

MR. LEVIN: Not one?

DR. ADLER: Not one.

MR. LEVIN: Why do you think?



DR. ADLER: I gave you the reasons.

MR. LEVIN: They were concerned about accepting the financial responsibility?

DR. ADLER: The financial responsibility, and some just didn't want to get involved, as I say.

MR. LEVIN: And you also mentioned that some felt that by bringing other German-Jewish refugees would make the Jewish community too conspicuous, would rock the boat?

DR. ADLER: No, it would bring more -- no, no -- when I use "rocks the boat," I didn't refer to that. I referred to bring the concept of anti-Semitism and what was done [in Germany] into the open before the Christian world. You know, so that they would not have to say --- this is right that this happened to the Jews, or things of this sort. They wanted to avoid the approval [of Germany's treatment of the Jews] on their disapproval [of Jews in Memphis protesting such treatment] of the non-Jewish community.

MR. LEVIN: If I might move on, Dr. Adler, you mentioned to me that when you came to Memphis, your name was not Adler.

DR. ADLER: That's right.

MR. LEVIN: What was your name in Germany?

DR. ADLER: Lauchheimer.

MR. LEVIN: How do you spell that?

DR. ADLER: L-A-U-C-H-H-E-I-M-E-R.

MR. LEVIN: And your first names?

DR. ADLER: Hans Justin.



MR. LEVIN: How do you spell Justin?

DR. ADLER: J-U-S-T-I-N.

MR. LEVIN: Why did you change your name?

DR. ADLER: I changed my name because the name "Hans" was too German. They [in Memphis] didn't like anything German at the time. Besides that, I had had trouble with people to remember my name. Most people had difficulty correctly pronouncing my surname, Lauchheimer. I mean, nobody pronounced it the same all the time, so I decided to accept my mother's maiden name.

MR. LEVIN: Did people advise you to change your name from Hans to Justin? Or was that your own feeling?

DR. ADLER: No, I think I made this my own decision and in deference or to honor my uncle, Herman Adler.

MR. LEVIN: But you felt that Hans was too German, and there was an anti-German feeling in the community?

DR. ADLER: That's right.

MR. LEVIN: Not only in the general community, in the Jewish community?

DR. ADLER: Everywhere -- everywhere. And particularly in the Jewish community.

MR. LEVIN: If you're amenable, if I'm not tiring you out, Dr. Adler, if we might look at just two other incidents, please. The first one is the journey of the St. Louis, the refugee boat that became very prominent public news in June, 1939, when a boatload of 907 German Jewish refugees had their Cuban visas repudiated by the Cuban





government. And the Jewish Community tried to win visas for them to come into the United States, and President Roosevelt refused. That was reported in The Commercial Appeal in the first week of June, in the Memphis Press-Scimitar, and in The Hebrew Watchman. Do you recall any discussions about the plight of those refugees?

DR. ADLER No.

MR. LEVIN: Mr. Gerber at the time was President of the Baron Hirsch Congregation. He was also the City Attorney. And he was also a lieutenant, a right-hand man, of Boss Crump.

DR. ADLER: Yes.

MR. LEVIN: Do you recall him ever agitating or using his influence or his political connections to do something about those refugees on the St. Louis?

DR. ADLER: I don't remember that.

MR. LEVIN: There was no public discussion, public meetings?

DR. ADLER: I do not recall that he ever did anything of the sort. Aside from being President of the Baron Hirsch, I don't remember -- I just don't remember much about him. I really don't.

MR. LEVIN: The final thing that I'd like to explore with you, Dr. Adler, is at the time the Zionist component of each community, in Memphis, and in other communities was involved in the struggle for Palestine, do you recall any meetings that the Memphis Zionist district sponsored



to try and get the British to allow German Jewish refugees to go to Palestine?

DR. ADLER: I don't remember.

MR. LEVIN: You don't recall any of that kind of activity at all? Dr. Adler, you have a very unique perspective to remember the years of the 1930's because you, through your own personal experience in Germany, and through that of your parents, knew that something bad was happening in Germany to the Jews. How did you view the apparent indifference of the Memphis Jewish Community to the plight of the German Jewish Community?

DR. ADLER: How do I explain it?

MR. LEVIN: Yes, how do you explain it? Were they just uncaring people?

DR. ADLER: I don't think that they were uncaring. I don't think that is the right term.

MR. LEVIN: Were they ignorant of the situation?

DR. ADLER: I think they didn't want to know.

MR. LEVIN: Why?

DR. ADLER: Because it was disturbing to them. It was disturbing to them what might even happen here. It was disturbing to them because somehow or another it disturbed the equanimity of their existence. Don't you agree with that? [turning to Mrs. Adler]

MRS. ADLER: They didn't want to be reminded -- they didn't want to --



DR. ADLER: They didn't want to be reminded that they themselves are on thin ice.

MR. LEVIN: When you say that they themselves were on thin ice, are you suggesting that they were concerned about anti-Semitic eruptions here in Memphis?

DR. ADLER: Yes, I believe so. Not necessarily anti-Semitic eruption, but a deepening of an anti-Semitic attitude. You've got to remember that as much as these things were reported against the Jews, not all Americans were against Hitler.

MR. LEVIN: The Bund was very active at the time. The German Bund.

DR. ADLER: There were German groups everywhere. Germania, and so on, but there were many, many Americans who supported that. The things that turned the most Americans eventually against Hitler was, of course, the war and subsequently, the concentration camps. After all, even nowadays, there are people running around and saying "Heil, Hitler."

MR. LEVIN: Dr. Adler, in conclusion, is there anything else that you would like to share with me as an historian that could be helpful in shedding some light as to why the Memphis Jewish Community was not more active in trying to save, salvage, extricate Jews in Germany in the 1930s? Especially after Kristalnacht?!

DR. ADLER: I don't know what else -- nothing comes into my mind right now in addition to that what I said,



but --

MRS. ADLER: They didn't want to import anti-Semitism really.

They were afraid of that, basically. I think there was this innate fear of arousing -- importing -- Nazism.

DR. ADLER: You know, the idea --

MRS. ADLER: Excuse me a minute, I always shall remember that one of your cousins was mad at the German Jews because she felt that the German Jews were responsible for the death of her son, who was killed during the war. He was an officer in the American Army and was killed. She never talked to her German cousins after his death. She felt that she never wanted anything to do with them because she felt we were responsible for it in some way.

DR. ADLER: That the German Jews were responsible that Hitler came to power, and that Hitler started the war, and that we [German Jews], indirectly, individually as well as in total, are responsible for the fact that her son, who was a lieutenant in the American Army, got killed during the war.

MR. LEVIN: I understand her pain, but that sounds like "blaming the victims" syndrome.

MRS. ADLER: That's right, but "we had to send our men to war to save the German Jews," this sort of thing -- this attitude. It explains a little bit of some of the feeling of the people.





MR. LEVIN: Dr. Adler, I greatly appreciate the time that you have shared with me, generously.

DR. ADLER: I tried to think if there is anything else in this connection here.

MR. LEVIN: Dr. Adler, did you ever return to your home town, the city of your birth in Germany, after the war?

DR. ADLER: Yes.

MR. LEVIN: Could you share with me the circumstances?

DR. ADLER: I did not really want to go back, but somehow or other I had a chance for Herta and I to take a trip to Germany.

MR. LEVIN: What year was that?

DR. ADLER: 1965, around, Herta?

MRS. ADLER: Must be around 1968.

DR. ADLER: Around 1965. We went back to my hometown, Gruenstadt. Because my real father is buried there. Aside from the fact that his grave was pretty much neglected and partly broken, as well as many others. I tried to go back into the home where I was born, but this was like going into an ice cellar. Everything strange, and I wasn't really welcomed by those people.

MR. LEVIN: But it was still the original building?

DR. ADLER: Yes. But then I wanted to go to the Synagogue which was still there. At first, they didn't want to let me in because it belonged to a butcher. A butcher had bought it, one whose store was right behind it.



Finally, I demanded that I go into the Synagogue. I really became unpleasant. And then they let me go in the Synagogue. And when I walked into the Synagogue, I saw the carcasses hanging there, of pigs, in the Synagogue. They killed the pigs in the Synagogue. [Literally, but also referring to what the Germans/Nazis did during the Holocaust: frequently rounding up Jews (whom they referred to as "pigs") into the local Synagogue and brutalizing and killing them there.] And hanging there. And I saw -- I have a picture here of it [showing a picture]. All I could do was sit down and say Kaddish [Jewish memorial prayer associated with the dead]. That's all I could do.

MR. LEVIN: Very painful.

DR. ADLER: I saw the place [in the Synagogue] where mother always sat. The place was still there, a little balcony up there [pointing to the picture]. Of course, downstairs, I couldn't even go downstairs, because it was horrible looking with blood. And it just -- this was one of the most unpleasant things in my entire life. At the time I just said, "For G-d's sake! Why didn't we just bomb this goddam town to smithereens?! Why didn't we?!"

MR. LEVIN: Did any of the townsfolk recognize you, or remember you?

DR. ADLER: Yes. One old lady who had worked for my father -- we visited her. I told her, "Goodbye, I will never see you again because I never will come back." And I have never been back. It was a terrible experience.



MR. LEVIN: Dr. Adler, is there something else that you would like to add that you have just recalled?

DR. ADLER: Yes. I remember now. For some reason or another, it had slipped my mind. It was not only my parents my uncle brought over here. He also brought over all his sisters who still lived in Germany with their families. That is a Mrs. Schlesinger, no, she was here before. It was Seligman, and Levy, Julius Levy and Ludwig Levy and Mata Strauss. And the son of Ludwig Levy is Dr. Joe Levy here in town, and the son of Julius Levy is Henry Levy with Goldman Sachs [brokerage firm in Memphis]. He is the son-in-law of Sam Cooper. And there was an aunt, Fanny Seligman, and she had a son -- she had really two sons. The one son died in World War I. The other son came to Memphis and became a pretty well-known man. He was written up in the Reader's Digest.

MRS. ADLER: He was featured in a "This is your Life" article. He helped prisoners. He rehabilitated prisoners and found jobs for them.

DR. ADLER: Yes, he helped rehabilitate prisoners.

MR. LEVIN: (Looking at the article being shown him): He sponsored one thousand and eighteen prisoners. That's incredible.

MRS. ADLER: He never really made a living doing that.

DR. ADLER: (laughing, ironically): He was one of the Germans who came over here, where they were afraid he would be a burden!



MR. LEVIN: Well, it seems to me that your uncle, Mr. Herman Adler, is responsible single-handedly for saving a score of people.

MRS. ADLER: Yes, his family.

DR. ADLER: That's right. He supported them.

MR. LEVIN: And if other members of the community would have responded in the same way the picture would have been radically different.

DR. ADLER: Exactly.

MR. LEVIN: It is puzzling and mysterious to try and understand the human psyche as to why they did not.

DR. ADLER: It would make a good story some day.





THIS IS MARK LEVIN, PARTICIPATING IN THE MEMPHIS STATE ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH PROJECT. THE DATE IS WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 1990. THE PROJECT IS "THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF MEMPHIS AND ITS AWARENESS OF, AND RESPONSE TO, THE GROWING CRISIS OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN GERMANY UNDER HITLER IN THE 1930s." THE PLACE IS MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE. FOLLOWING AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. JUSTIN H. ADLER, A MEMPHIS JEWISH PSYCHIATRIST, WHO ARRIVED IN MEMPHIS AS A GERMAN JEWISH REFUGEE IN THE 1930s, DR. ADLER RECORDED ADDITIONAL COMMENTS, OBSERVATIONS AND MEMORIES. HE DID SO OF HIS OWN INITIATIVE, AND I AM TREATING HIS EFFORTS AS A SECOND INTERVIEW. THE INTERVIEW IS BY A. MARK LEVIN, WHO IS ALSO PRESENTLY SERVING AS AN ORTHODOX JEWISH RABBI OF THE (ORTHO-DOX) JEWISH CONGREGATION ANSHEI SPHARD-BETH EL EMETH, MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE, AND FOR THIS REASON, DR. ADLER REFERS TO THE INTERVIEWER AS "RABBI." THE INTERVIEW WAS TRANSCRIBED BY RUTH COX AND EDITED BY A. MARK LEVIN.

DR. ADLER: Here now are a few notes which I would like to add to an interview which Rabbi Levin recorded, and instead of writing it down, instead just talking to him myself, I am going to put it down here on my tape, while I might think about it. I just got through reviewing the manuscript [Dr. Adler is referring to an edited transcript of the first interview with Rabbi Levin]. I made a number of corrections and I added an explanation to it as far as I could. But as I went through this manuscript, the thing that struck me and bothered me considerably is the fact that there were so many things I



could not remember. Now, it may sound as if it didn't make an emotional impression on me at the time. This, of course, is absolutely untrue. Undoubtedly it must have made an impression upon me, because after all, I went through it; my family was involved. Many of my family were still in Germany, and later on they were killed, but somehow or another, the feelings and my reaction which I experienced in the thirties I simply cannot recall. I can only think of the possibility, number one, I am right now eighty-three years old. What happened in the thirties, when I was between twenty-six and thirty-three years old, and although I believe that my memory is still not bad, a difference of 55 to 60 years in time makes you forget things which you really didn't want to forget in the first place. This is just one of the ravages of time, which takes its toll on human existence and living, whether we like it or not.

I remember the anger and hate I experienced against the deeds of Nazism, before the war as well as during the war, and after the war. I remember when I was in the army, in England, when I expressed myself in violent terms against Nazism, that some of my Jewish co-officers said to me I should not be so ruthless and angry against an enemy. They actually rebuked me for it.

Nobody likes to admit to oneself that one has forgotten things, especially of that magnitude and extent. But to be frank, I am actually angry at my own self for having forgotten it. I am angry at myself that I have forgotten what my reaction was and what the reaction was of my immediate neighborhood and



friends and acquaintances in the 1930s when one could read in the newspapers of the misdeeds and atrocities committed by the Nazis against the Jews in Europe. But I want you to remember something else.

Not too long ago there was a war in Vietnam, and we know the atrocities which were committed not only by the Vietnamese but also our own troops. What did we read in the papers about it once in a while? It was something far away -- in another part of the world, and relatively few people did anything about it except later on, when they came back and suffered from the post-traumatic stress disorders.

There is something else, Rabbi. You asked me how I felt in the thirties when I came to the United States and saw the segregation of the black people and the maltreatment of the black people. You asked me how I felt in the light of the maltreatment I escaped from Germany. I believe this comparison or even an attempted comparison is unjustified -- certainly unbalanced. What we experienced in Europe, the persecution occurred over a relatively short time -- it was against our immediate concepts of civilization and a way of life as it existed. All of this occurred in a matter of a few years. [On the other hand] the attitudes of Americans against the black people which I encountered upon arriving in Memphis was one of a hundred or two hundred year old, or possibly more, tradition. It was also a way of life. This, however, had covered a much longer period. Apparently it was taken as a form of existence, and I was confronted with that, not being able to judge it. I was not even



in a position to judge it, because I myself came from persecution. I myself was insecure. I myself had no right, no standing whatsoever, to express what I felt about the maltreatment of the blacks here in the south. I still recall that I was called a "nigger lover" and when I was trying to be friendly with some of the black people.

After all, you must remember that in the thirties that was the time when they still lynched black people. People were killed, and nobody knew anything about it. Nobody cared about it. This was just a way of life here in Memphis. Most Memphis [black] people at the time came from Mississippi. I mean, both gentiles and Jews accepted the status of the blacks [which] was undoubtedly below normal human concepts. You asked me what attitude I had. You are thinking in terms of the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and 1990s [and applying contemporary attitudes to the events of the 1930s], instead of judging with the values and concepts in force at that time, and relating it to the 1930s. It simply was a different world. Nowadays we can speak out when we feel aggressed against. Black people have a loud voice now. They didn't have one in the 1930s. The Jewish people have a loud voice now, through B'nai Brith and many other organizations, like the Jewish Congress, etc. We didn't have a voice like that in the thirties. We have laws now which equalize the races and beliefs, or, at least they should follow the law. We didn't have laws like that in the 1930s when I came to Memphis. I was just a little refugee, not even yet a citizen of the United States. I had to establish myself first, before my voice





could be heard, and before I had the right and the power to express myself. That took time, years, four years of military service, years of practice of medicine and trying to practice the healing arts before my name meant something in Memphis. Back in the thirties and early forties, before I was married, I couldn't even get a date with a girl, Jewish or gentile, because I was, whether I like it or not to say, whether I say it or not and like to think about it, I just was a little refugee who was given a place to live and to exist, to contribute as much as possible to his new home. Luckily, I was happy to make contributions to my new home.

I gave you off the record, a few samples of my efforts to help other Jews to come over from Germany, and I was rebuffed. Rabbi, there are sometimes events in one's life which are so unpleasant that you just don't want them to be true. Maybe I wanted to forget things, things which I could not reconcile with my concepts of right and wrong, or good and bad. I surely cannot recall what may remain dormant in my memory, a fact which we ordinarily call "forgetting." While I was writing, or rather talking here, some other incidents popped into my mind which I had forgotten.

Before I went into the military service, I treated the son of a very prominent Memphis Jewish attorney. I tried to treat him--psychotherapeutically. During a conversation with his father, he suddenly stated to me, "You have a German accent. You are now living in the United States, and you should make any and every effort to get rid of your German accent, because we don't



like anything that comes from Germany." I pointed out to him at the time that when I came here, it would be very difficult for me to lose any trace of a German accent, but he stated I should take lessons -- speech lessons. And I pointed out that other famous psychiatrists had accents and who practiced in the United States. Having been educated and trained in Germany certainly should not be a disgrace, and that having a slight German accent could not be harmful for a psychiatrist. Thereupon, he became exceedingly angry with me, and he stated that as a Jew I should not have an accent. I mention this only as an illustration of the intolerant attitude which prevailed towards the end of the thirties and the beginning of the forties against anything that came from Germany, and the lack of any compassion which the people had at that time. He was a very prominent man, and it was the last I saw of him professionally.

Rabbi, your scientific inquiries into this present-day project, the Jewish Community in the context of Memphis in the 1930s, etcetera, is being studied and worked at in the year 1990. Is it possible to do this now, because of the much more tolerant attitude, a more inquisitive attitude, from an historical point of view. If this study had been initiated, or if it had been attempted to be initiated, let's say, in 1950 and 1960, one could have obtained a good deal more of competent information without an infusion of forgetfulness and forgetting, repression. But it would have been impossible to do it at that time, because there were still undoubtedly leftovers of the



intolerance and indifference towards the suffering brothers which prevailed in the thirties and forties.

There is another aspect, Rabbi, which I am sure you are aware of. The only communication between different countries was the newspaper in the 1930s and 1940s. At that time you read about the dying of people and people being rejected and the ships being sent away from our shores, loaded down with Jews destined to be killed. That was black and white print on paper, and it did not have the same effect upon people and did not have the same impression upon people as the one that we see today on television, seeing when it was actually happening at that moment. There was no television at that time. There was hardly enough radio at that time, and so the radio wouldn't have made any difference neither. What we say now many times -- if one or two or three or four people get killed, it will make headlines. They report it nationwide over the TV. [In the 1940s] when a million people got killed, it just was a notice in the newspaper. It's nothing with a majority of people, except for the ones who are actually involved, directly or indirectly. This is another reason why comparisons of attitudes nowadays with the attitudes of fifty years ago is unfair and, I would almost say, not valid.

After all, the extent of the atrocities perpetrated on the Jews in Europe was not even known until our own troops marched into Germany and entered the Concentration Camps. The animosity and anger aroused when it was shown on television was a form of knowledge, of experiencing a knowledge which simply did not



exist before, and consequently, could not have the terrific and unbelievable impact which the picture on the tube was able to arouse and did arouse. Reading in the newspaper about atrocities simply cannot be compared. As the saying goes, "One picture is worth a thousand words," and this certainly is true when it comes to the attitude of people towards the events that took place under Hitler.

I want you to know I am not trying to excuse the attitude of the Memphis people towards their lack of compassion at the time. As a psychiatrist, I think I'm able to understand and comprehend that there was a lack of knowledge of the depth and extent of the atrocities, even if it was written for two weeks in the Memphis newspaper, possibly even longer.

I am thinking out loud right now. You know, Rabbi, Jews always have been extremely insecure, as far as their physical existence is concerned, as far as tolerance is concerned, for at least two thousand or more years. We were suppressed by the Romans and by the surrounding Arabs. We were oppressed by the Church for thousands of years. They [the Jews] were burned at the stake and murdered, maltreated and mistreated, to a point where chronic fear has become part of a Jewish existence. And this has to be taken into consideration when one passes judgment as to the attitude of others, especially in a time when there is less evidence of threat and maltreatment than in the past. However, I say it seems that there is less of a threat. I'm just not too sure about it. I'm just not too sure that somewhere or somehow, in some place, another Hitler may arise again. This





Hitler of the future may be black or may be white, or maybe a mixture of both. But I do know that history repeats itself. I hope this will never happen, but it is only a hope which I express, with an underlying traditional fear of being wrong in one's hopes.

Rabbi, I have expressed some of my feelings here on this tape. You might get fed up listening to it, but if you will, please listen to it at least once before you throw this tape away. Maybe one or two points will ring true. Maybe you may remember a few ideas which I have expressed. At any rate, I do thank you, Rabbi, for taking the time of putting together information about a subject which should have been investigated many, many years ago. In saying to you "Shalom," [a Hebrew word meaning "peace, a form of greeting], I want to extend to you "Shalom Aleichem [Hebrew, meaning "peace be upon you"], encompassing you, as well as mankind.



THIS IS A. MARK LEVIN, PARTICIPATING IN THE MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH PROJECT. THE DATE TODAY IS THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 1990, AND I AM INTERVIEWING DR. JUSTIN ADLER, A MEMPHIS JEWISH PSYCHIATRIST. OUR SUBJECT IS "THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF MEMPHIS AND ITS AWARENESS OF AND RESPONSE TO THE GROWING CRISIS OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN GERMANY UNDER HITLER IN THE 1930's." THIS IS THE THIRD INTERVIEW WITH DR. ADLER. THE INTERVIEW IS BY A. MARK LEVIN AND WAS TRANSCRIBED BY RUTH COX AND EDITED BY A. MARK LEVIN.

MR. LEVIN: Dr. Adler, I appreciate you sharing the second tape with me about your feelings following our interview together. I felt badly because I felt that you were defensive, because you sensed that I was somehow holding you responsible for not doing more. Am I correct that you felt defensive?

DR. ADLER: No, I don't hold you responsible for that at all.

My feeling of uneasiness--put it this way--which I had at the time, which I experienced at the time and shortly after, retrospectively, is due to the fact that I either did not remember exactly how I felt. Or, if I could remember it, if it was there in my memory, it was erased; it was made inactive. That is, of course, something which involved my total life at the time -- my total existence and the totality of my family, and beyond that, of every Jew I knew.

MR. LEVIN: Do you mean, Dr. Adler, that the anger that you felt but you suppressed at that time, surfaced recently when we talked about those things.



DR. ADLER: Yes.

MR. LEVIN: A kind of displaced anger.

DR. ADLER: That's correct. I mean, postponed anger, or re-awakened anger. Because I do remember how angry I was when I visited some people here in town and asked for affidavits for some people and was refused. And I was angry at the time, but I was helpless.

MR. LEVIN: When you say you were helpless, what do you mean?

DR. ADLER: I couldn't do nothing about it. I only could say, "that's the way it is."

MR. LEVIN: Did you speak to the Rabbis at the time?

DR. ADLER: No, I didn't speak to the Rabbi at all, because first of all, I only knew one Rabbi in town. That was Rabbi [Harry] Ettelson [Rabbi of Temple Israel]. I knew him only by seeing him, and maybe saying hello.

MRS. ADLER: There was another Rabbi who was your friend, who married us.

DR. ADLER: Yes, but that was in 1943. That was later on.

He was assistant Rabbi, but of course he didn't have much to do. What was his name?

MRS. ADLER: Weinberg.

DR. ADLER: Yes, Weinberg, Dudley Weinberg. He was Assistant Rabbi. Did he commit suicide later?

MR. LEVIN: He was Assistant Rabbi at Temple Israel?

DR. ADLER: Yes.

MRS. ADLER: Committed suicide in his office.

MR. LEVIN: Did you attempt, possibly, to speak to some of the



press? Or to people in the Community? [This part was erased when the tape ended.]

DR. ADLER: In fact, I must have talked to my relatives because I was going around. I'm sure I talked to Uncle Herman.

MR. LEVIN: Herman Adler?

DR. ADLER: Uncle Herman Adler, but like most of the Jewish people here in town, he shrugged his shoulders and said he couldn't do anything about it. However, of course he was the one who helped me to come here by talking to Senator [Douglas K.] McKellar [U.S. Senator from Tennessee at that time]. Now, I don't know whether he had discussed everything with somebody else. The reason Senator McKellar came in was not because he was a personal acquaintance to Uncle Herman Adler; but Uncle Herman Adler had sat down and had some business dealings with a company called Marx & Bensdorf.

MR. LEVIN: A real estate company.

DR. Adler: Yes, a finance company, a real estate company, and later on, with his business dealings went sour but, anyway, they knew Senator McKellar very well, and Senator McKellar was approached through the Marx & Bensdorf people. And of course, Senator McKellar was instrumental in helping to bring the rest of the family over here. I don't know, I somewhat doubt it. Because I came in 1933; my brother came in 1934; and by that time already, Uncle Herman's affidavit was accepted. Maybe on the basis because he had applied before. I don't know this for sure.





MR. LEVIN: It might be interesting to know, Dr. Adler, that

Senator McKellar's papers are in the Memphis Public Library; and next week, with the assistance of the librarians there, I'm going to be researching Senator McKellar's correspondence about the requests that people made for his assistance to get visas for refugees. But if I might ask you a question, Dr. Adler, when you were at Bolivar State Hospital [in Bolivar, Tennessee], you called Mr. Abe Waldauer about a bill that was pending in the Tennessee Senate no longer to allow or to accept refugee doctors from practicing in Tennessee.

DR. ADLER: Wait a moment, I did that? [expressing surprise, not recollecting]

MR. LEVIN: Do you remember that?

DR. ADLER: No, it could be --

MR. LEVIN: Apparently, the bill did not affect you directly, because you were here already, and you were working.

DR. ADLER: Just a minute. Whether I approached Waldauer or not, I do not recall; but I remember there was such a movement going on.

MR. LEVIN: Do you recall what year? It was when you were in Bolivar.

DR. ADLER: It was in around 1935 or 1936, something like that.

MR. LEVIN: Before you went to Johns Hopkins in Baltimore? Could it have

been after you returned from Johns Hopkins?

DR. ADLER: I doubt it, because that was in 19 -- of course it



could have been -- it was about 1936. I returned from Johns Hopkins in 1936, and stayed in Bolivar two years until 1938. To differentiate from one year to another after fifty years is difficult.

MR. LEVIN: It will be possible for me to track down the date because I came across this piece of information when I was doing some research in the Mississippi Valley Special Collections of Memphis State University, and about fifteen or eighteen years ago, one of the professors there interviewed Abe Waldauer while he was still alive. And Abe Waldauer specifically mentioned this bill, and he specifically mentioned your name. That you had contacted him, and that in turn he went and spoke directly to the Governor, because Mr. Waldauer was connected politically. He went and spoke directly to the Governor, and the Governor killed the bill.

DR. ADLER: Could be. That particular detail I do not remember, but I do recall there was a bill at the time.

MR. LEVIN: What was the purpose of the bill?

DR. ADLER: Well, to keep the other doctors from coming to Tennessee, and to reduce competition. After all, the many political things have economic backgrounds.

MR. LEVIN: So that is something that you, perhaps unbeknownst to you, the late Mr. Waldauer credits your phone call to him for killing that bill.

MRS. ADLER: He didn't know anything about it, Waldauer, sure. You brought it to his attention.

MR. LEVIN: I don't know if he ever came back to you and said,



"Dr. Adler, I took care of it."

DR. ADLER: I'm pretty sure he didn't, because I don't know whether I remember or not, but I don't recall that he ever came back to me.

MR. LEVIN: So that if there were other German Jewish doctors who had succeeded in getting visas through relatives, affidavits in this country, who came to Tennessee, they were allowed to practice and their credentials were accepted, thanks to you.

DR. ADLER: Could be.

MR. LEVIN: That's what Mr. Waldauer's interview states. He had no reason for fabricating it, and he did not know that you didn't know or that I would be talking to you, so I accept what he says as being accurate.

DR. ADLER: It probably is true, because I did know Abe Waldauer. Now, I don't recall any more -- I believe it was the second time -- after I had returned from Johns Hopkins, because at that time I had a little bit better social standing here in town. And having come from Johns Hopkins, it gave me a little bit more entree. Besides that, at that time, approximately in 1937 or 1938 --

MR. LEVIN: Dr. Adler, you mentioned at the time you were treating Mr. Waldauer's son. Without specifying what you were treating him for, but it is possible that you met Mr. Waldauer at the time, and that he felt grateful to you, and you felt comfortable speaking to him about this bill.

DR. ADLER: Yes, that's correct. I had a number of conversa-



tions with him. And he was, of course, a very prominent political figure in Memphis, and a very prominent attorney, in his profession. And he said to me one time, "What you really should do is make more of an effort to lose your German accent." At the time, you know, I had come from Baltimore where nobody questioned that. I said to him "I do the best I can, you know, to talk English, but there's not much I can do about the German accent." Besides that I said to him, I remember, jokingly, that there had been some very famous psychiatrists like Sigmund Freud and people who spoke German. Speaking with a little German accent -- that might be helpful to me in my profession. So, I treated it kind of lightly and in kind of a joking way, but he was very angry at this answer. The reason I mentioned this -- I'm not saying it as a personal thing.

MR. LEVIN: You shared that with me to demonstrate that there was some antipathy to refugees.

DR. ADLER: Correct. That was the basic reason. The basis for his statement was, "please do something that you are not conspicuous." Do something so that the German background is not so evident.

MR. LEVIN: Dr. Adler, in our first interview together, when I asked you, did you feel that the Jewish people in Memphis were somehow thankful for the fact that there was a black community in Memphis that was oppressed -- and that if not for the black people, it is possible that the Jews may have been the targets of whatever latent feelings of hostility were residual for other people who are different from them. In the





context of our discussion at the time, you thought I was asking you why you didn't take the initiative or the lead in trying to improve the lot of the blacks. That was not the thrust of my question. The thrust of my question is did the Jews in Memphis -- did you get the feeling that they were thankful to have the blacks -- better that they be oppressed than the Jews?

DR. ADLER: I think that a feeling like this might have been in existence. But in order to experience or to interpret a feeling like this, Rabbi, you have to be a little bit more a part of the community already; part already having lived within the community to understand the overall attitude. And I still was a newcomer, even at that time. And I still was a foreigner. So, if I had this feeling, which is quite possible, I certainly could not have fought against it, because the Jewish community at that time was just as much anti-black as the Christian community. And there was a definite anti-Semitic situation in Memphis, and in Mississippi, and everywhere else. For the Jewish people at that time to know that Jews are openly persecuted in another country, that aroused more fear in them -- much rather [than] sympathy. Because it's somebody else.

MR. LEVIN: If Memphis Jews had knowledge, which they did have, that German Jews were being persecuted in an horrendous fashion, rather than inviting their sympathy and their efforts to help, what do you mean, it aroused fear?

DR. ADLER: It aroused a certain amount of hidden fears of being persecuted themselves, because at that time there were -- I know there was the Ku Klux Klan -- sure it existed at



that time already! At that time, there were burnings down in Mississippi, and at that time there were open hostilities against blacks here; and you could see and know that somebody might read it and persecute it, and you yourself are not in a very sound basis -- I mean, in this respect, it is more or less almost a psychological consequence that you say, "I hope it doesn't mean me," like they say, "here, but for the grace of G-d go I."

MR. LEVIN: The fact that it's happening in Germany means that it could very easily happen here in Memphis, America.

DR. ADLER: Yes.

MRS. ADLER: Definitely -- and the fear was that the German Jews would import anti-Semitism.

DR. ADLER: That would help to precipitate anti-Semitism. Because you must remember again something else in this connection. And I only can talk [about] Memphis, but it may apply to other communities too. There was a dissension among the Jews between those called the Eastern Jews and the Western Jews. The Eastern Jew didn't like the German [Jews]. They called them "deitscher." [a derogatory name for "German"] The Western Jews felt a little bit threatened.

MR. LEVIN: Didn't they also reciprocate the feeling and call them "Ostjuden?" [a derogatory term meaning "East European Jews"]

MRS. ADLER: [addressing her husband, who is hard of hearing] Did the German Jews call them [the East European Jews] "Ostjuden"?



DR. ADLER: Me? No. It never occurred to me. The term didn't mean anything to me at all. An explanation why it didn't mean anything was where I lived in Germany, in the western part, close to the French border, you hardly ever saw any people coming from the East. [Indistinguishable] No airplanes that could come over. They had to walk almost across Germany.

MR. LEVIN: Dr. Adler, it might interest you to know that the sentiment that "thank G-d for the blacks," because if it were not for the black people, we Jews would be the target of hostility and anger and resentment, is a sentiment that I heard frequently expressed in the country of my origins, the country of my birth -- in South Africa. And there are many Jews in South Africa today who are fearful that with the resolution, or the possible resolution, of the racial problem with the freeing of Nelson Mandela recently and the possibility of negotiations, that Jews will once again become a target.

DR. ADLER: If you, first hand, know that, then you can very well deduct that the same situation will exist in other countries, and did exist in other countries. History repeats itself, and the feelings are the same, and the feelings of the people today are basically the feelings of a thousand -- two thousand years ago, I mean the emotional reactions. That has not changed. Whatever has changed is the veneer, but not the people.

MR. LEVIN: I recently interviewed a gentleman by the name of Mr. Benjamin Goodman. The reason why I interviewed Mr. Goodman is because at the time, in 1938, 1939, he played a



very important role in the Memphis Jewish Welfare Fund and in the community leadership in Memphis. He shared with me, voluntarily, that his family had come to Memphis from Germany in the 1830s, 1840s, but they still had family in Germany in the 1930s. And when he graduated from law school, he traveled to Germany and met many members of his family. After he returned to Memphis and they began to write to him and communicate with him, he signed many affidavits for members of his family to come to the United States. None of them settled in Memphis. They went to other places in the United States. And one even to South America, he mentioned. And then he said to me -- he said, "You know, I had a letter from Albert Einstein, who wrote that his wife was a distant relative of your mother's family in Germany, and requesting a visa." So I asked Mr. Goodman, "Do you have that letter? It's a valuable historical document." And he said no, that in his foolishness he didn't think of it at the time, but he no longer had that letter. But what interested me was that he said that he signed an affidavit to bring her over. Now, this is something that he volunteered. The interview that I did with him is a matter of public record. I would be happy to share it with you. But it interested me because he volunteered it in light of when we talked about it, and it was your feeling that there were some people in the community who did not respond. And that was true; but in this particular case, perhaps unbeknownst to you, he did respond. So I wanted to share that with you.

MRS. ADLER: That you [referring to her husband, Dr. Adler] knew





about the letter from Einstein, who tried to help his relative.

DR. ADLER: I knew about the letter. I told you about it, because I saw the letter, and I translated it for him. And I asked him later on, one or two years later, I don't know -- later on, what ever happened. And he said nothing happened, nothing, didn't do nothing. That's what he told me.

MR. LEVIN: As a student of the human psyche, Dr. Adler, you can understand how people will not always reveal, for whatever their reasons were, and it is possible that he chose not to reveal that to you or share that with you at that time. But he was absolutely emphatic that he had, and I thought that I would share that with you, because that was a piece of knowledge you had -- some unfinished business, so to speak.

MRS. ADLER: Now, in general, when you received an affidavit, you went to the city where the affidavit came from, because you needed somebody to help you, somebody to support you. So it would be very strange, at least to me, that all his relatives that got an affidavit to the United States would settle in South America or would go to some other cities.

MR. LEVIN: One of them went to South America, but many of them, he told me, settled, if I seemed to remember, in New York, Philadelphia, some other cities as well.

DR. ADLER: Have you ever seen an affidavit like that?

MR. LEVIN: No, I've never seen an affidavit.

DR. ADLER: The affidavit states, categorically, that the person



who signs it will guarantee to the United States government that that particular person who will come over will not be a burden to the public, a burden to welfare organizations and things like that.

MR. LEVIN: Did the affidavit specify that the person on whose behalf it was made had to live in the city of the person?

DR. ADLER: No, it doesn't have that. But in order to be supported, you know, you cannot be too far away.

MR. LEVIN: I have a feeling that at the time in 1938, 1939, Mr. Goodman was a very successful attorney. He was connected with a very prestigious law firm in Memphis. And my assumption is that he was unmarried at the time -- still is -- and didn't have any family responsibilities. And it seems that I guess he could produce for the Internal Revenue Service documentation that he could support it. I know that when I came to this country as an immigrant, and I wanted to leave for a visit to Israel, the authorities would not allow me in again unless I could produce an affidavit signed by an American citizen, documented, that they could afford to support me. So I had to find a very wealthy American Jew who would undertake that responsibility and have that confidence in me. So that resonates with me a little bit.

DR. ADLER: Because I remember now that I was not permitted to leave the United States as long as I was not a citizen. I remember that.

MRS. ADLER: I would still think, in general, and I know quite a



few refugees who always went to the cities of the family or friends or people who gave the affidavit.

MR. LEVIN: In many cases, it meant that they moved into their homes, so that they wouldn't have to have the additional expense of renting another home or an apartment immediately. And it seems to me that's very plausible.

DR. ADLER: But as far as the statement is concerned, I remember distinctly that he said to me either nothing came of it, or he didn't give the affidavit or something of the sort. I remember this very distinctly.

MR. LEVIN: And that's what triggered me. He volunteered the information, and he was very proud of it -- that he had helped Albert Einstein [who] had written him a letter. I wanted to share that with you, Dr. Adler, in the sense that you had some feelings about him for not having helped this particular individual, and according to his testimony today, he had no reason to raise the incident.

DR. ADLER: Well, why not -- it's a letter from Einstein! It is a letter of communication --

MR. LEVIN: But he couldn't produce it.

DR. ADLER: I saw it.

MRS. ADLER: But Einstein was not as important -- not the great personality he is now. At that time, if it would have been important to him, he would have kept the letter.

MR. LEVIN: So we have a little bit of a mystery here.

DR. ADLER: Look here, I cannot go up and say to him, "you are



lying." I couldn't do that, but I can only say that's what he told me.

MR. LEVIN: Absolutely.

MRS. ADLER: But nobody nowadays wants to make himself look bad.

Nobody whom you would interview would want to say, "Well, I didn't give a hoot --"

DR. ADLER: I think there was another family at the time, a very prominent family, who absolutely refused to do anything at all, and in fact I have the letters here of their relatives. I still have -- I never turned it over to them because I was damned angry. Asking for them to come out. They are in this little cabinet [pointing].

MRS. ADLER: The man is dead so you can certainly mention the name.

DR. ADLER: Well, it was a [mentioning a name, indistinctly].

MR. LEVIN: That sounds like it was a name from German origins.

DR. ADLER: Oh yes. The only people I knew at the time who were introduced or who I was told to talk to. I remember Rabbi Taxon here in town, and about the Baron Hirsch Synagogue. I went there once or twice -- not to Baron Hirsch, to the other one -- I think it was the Beth El Emeth -- I'm not quite sure, where my uncle Schlesinger -- Martin Schlesinger -- he was a prominent member there. He took me there a number of times, and I went with him. But I didn't know the people. He took me there again. I had not much contact with them.

MR. LEVIN: Dr. Adler, I appreciate you again spending some time





and sharing with me. You have been very helpful to me in helping build a picture of that time -- the climate within the Jewish Community at that time -- to understand why they responded or the lack of response to some very, very horrendous circumstances that affected the German Jewish Community. I appreciate that very much. Thank you.

DR. ADLER: You're welcome.















